

VZCZCXRO1579  
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHLB #0032/01 0080644  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 080644Z JAN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7074  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0710

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000032

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING  
STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/FO:ATACHCO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/05/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 8-AOUN FORCES SUSPICIOUS OF ARAB  
DIPLOMACY

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (SBU) Polchief called on Lebanese Ambassador to the Arab League Abdel Rahman Solh at his home in Ras Beirut January 4. Well into his 70's, Solh had a number of diplomatic postings when active in the Lebanese diplomatic service and also served as Assistant Secretary-General of the League before assuming his present post, by contrast a sinecure. A semi-retired man of leisure (he admitted that he had not spoken "a word of English in 30 years"), Solh nevertheless claimed that he accompanies Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa on all his meetings when he comes to Beirut -- including the round of visits in December 2005 during the events surrounding the assassination of Gebran Tueni and the recent initiative in December 2006 to attempt to resolve Lebanon's political crisis.

MOUSSA -- WAITING FOR ENCOURAGEMENT  
-----

¶2. (C) Moussa might return to Beirut if there is some improvement in the political impasse or some other "green light" Solh said, adding that he talks to Moussa on the phone several times a week. Still, Moussa would not return to Beirut under the previous conditions of December -- a dialogue of the deaf between the government and opposition. The League can only accomplish so much, he said, and blamed Lebanese elements and Syrian interference for the failure of its initiatives. Walid Jumblatt and other figures opposing good relations with Syria had scuttled Moussa's efforts in December 2005, and Nabih Berri had done the same a year later. Berri's (secret, but leaked) December 27 proposal was nothing more than a ploy to ruin Moussa's shuttle diplomacy, Solh averred. Though declaring himself neutral, Berri is a "prisoner" of Hizballah and Hizballah's Syrian allies, neither of which find it possible to trust an "Arab" initiative. Damascus was displeased with Moussa's late-December proposal for a reconciliation between the parties in Lebanon, and instructed Berri to make his counterproposal to scuttle it.

SAUDI INVOLVEMENT SO FAR UNHELPFUL  
-----

¶3. (C) When Moussa first arrived in late 2006 to negotiate, Solh told him that the conflict on the Lebanese scene is at bottom about the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Nevertheless, the conflict here could be solved through a Saudi-Syrian reconciliation. Solh told Polchief that King Abdullah had

become "very tense" when Moussa suggested this step when visiting Riyadh during his December peregrinations. Unfortunately, other Saudi initiatives had thus far been similarly unhelpful. Solh recounted that Saudi Ambassador to Beirut Abdulaziz Khoja had worked with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal on a proposal to the opposition to hold early presidential elections to replace Lahoud in return for dissolving the Siniora cabinet (a constitutional consequence of the election of a new president). However the Saudis realized that such a package, if tidy, would not be sufficiently attractive to the opposition, and that with Hizballah ally Nabih Berri holding the keys to the Chamber of Deputies there was no way to force Lahoud out.

#### REPLACING LAHOUD MAKES WAVES

-----

14. (C) Nevertheless, replacing Lahoud looms large in the League's thinking, despite Moussa's December public statement that he should serve out his term (which ends in November 2007). The intention of Moussa's statement had been to head off a violent reaction from Lahoud, who branded his early replacement "Chirac's wish" -- a reference to the perceived interest of the French President to pick Lahoud's successor in the seven-year Lebanese presidency before Chirac's own retirement in May 2007. In exploring candidates, Solh keeps close contact with Maronite figures and other Christians, and took a call from Aoun ally Ghassan Mukhaiber (a Greek Orthodox) on his mobile phone during Polchief's visit. Solh believes that many of Aoun's followers and MP's are becoming increasingly aware that Aoun will not attain the presidency and making their own backup plans. A rumor weeks ago that the Patriarch might endorse moderate Aounist MP Farid

BEIRUT 00000032 002 OF 002

al-Khazen for the top job shook Aoun to the core, Solh related, and maintaining his party's hierarchy and discipline is now Aoun's job number one.  
FELTMAN